

Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science

Volume 68 | Annual Issue

Article 42

1961

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Recommended Citation

Nomsen, Richard C. (1961) "Results of the 1958 and 1959 Pheasant Hunter Survey," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 68(1), 281-283.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol68/iss1/42>

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Results of the 1958 and 1959 Pheasant Hunter Survey

RICHARD C. NOMSEN¹

Abstract. Hunter questionnaire surveys were conducted in 1958 and 1959 to determine the number of pheasant hunters, the total number of birds killed, and the distribution of hunting pressure in Iowa. A one percent random sample was selected from the current license files. Results indicated that 75.2 percent of the licensees hunted pheasants in 1958 compared to 74.6 percent in 1959. A total of 267,455 hunters bagged 1,548,564 ringnecks in 1958 and 238,903 hunters killed 1,070,285 birds in 1959. Forty to 44 percent of the total season kill occurred during the first two days of the season. Hunter success figures and post-season sex ratios indicated that the major portion of Iowa's primary pheasant range could support greater hunting pressure. The response by cooperating hunters was excellent, with 43.6 percent and 49.0 returning the questionnaire for 1958 and 1959, respectively.

The Iowa Hunting and Fishing Survey of 1955² clearly indicated the popularity and importance of the ringneck pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*, in Iowa. Special surveys were conducted in 1958 and 1959 to collect additional information concerning the total pheasant harvest, number of pheasant hunters, distribution of hunting pressure and kill, and seasonal hunter activity.

SELECTION OF SAMPLE AND RESPONSE

A one percent random sample was drawn from the duplicate files of current license sales each year. Names were selected from each county according to the number of hunting and combination licenses sold. A record form, with a letter of instructions, was mailed during the winter to each hunter requesting information about the preceding hunting season. The first part of the questionnaire asked for the county of residence, whether or not pheasants were hunted, and if yes, how many times and the number of birds killed. Space was provided for date, county hunted, hours hunted, and birds bagged for each hunting trip if this information was available.

A total of 1,527 returns was received in 1958 which was 43.6 percent of the sample mailed. There was a 49.0 percent response in 1959 when 1,567 of 3,200 replied. License sales totaled 335,658 in 1958 and 320,246 in 1959. A change in the age requirement for purchase of 1959 licenses caused part of the decrease in total license sales and therefore affected the 1959 sample.

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² Sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conducted by Crossley, S-D Surveys, Inc., N. Y. C.

Replies to the first question indicated that 75.2 percent of the licensees hunted pheasants in 1958 compared to 74.6 percent in 1959. Pheasant hunting was most popular in the primary pheasant range where almost 90 percent of the sportsmen hunted ringnecks. Only 50-60 percent of the persons contacted in south central and southeast Iowa indicated that they hunted pheasants. Pheasants are scarce in this area and hunters must travel to other counties to take advantage of this popular sport.

Complete information concerning each hunting trip was furnished by 966 hunters in 1958 and by 1,087 in 1959. These replies were processed to obtain more detailed information about hunter activity.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

Hunter Success. A summary of the hunting results are given in Table 1. Estimates of the total season kill were made by applying mean values to the total number of licenses sold each year.

Table 1. Summary of Statewide Pheasant Hunting Success, Iowa, 1958-1959

	1958 Season	1959 Season
Average number of hunting trips	3.92	3.66
Average season kill	5.79	4.48
Hours per pheasant killed	2.12	2.81
Hunted—but killed no pheasants	14.2%	22.2%
Estimated total number of pheasant hunters	267,455	238,903
Estimated total number of pheasants killed	1,548,565	1,070,285

Seasonal Distribution of Hunting Pressure and Pheasant Kill. Results of this survey indicated that about 70 percent of the pheasant hunters hunted opening day. The first week of hunting accounted for 43 percent of the pressure and 52 percent of the total pheasant harvest (Table 2). In 1958, 40 percent of the cocks were taken the first 2 days compared with 44 percent in 1959.

Table 2. Seasonal Distribution of Hunting Pressure and Pheasant Kill, Iowa 1958-59

Week of Season	Percentage of hunting trips		Percentage of pheasants killed		Hours per pheasants killed	
	1958	1959	1958	1959	1958	1959
First Week	42.7	43.4	51.9	52.8	1.82	2.41
Second Week	24.0	29.5	20.6	25.4	2.34	3.09
Third Week	22.8	16.7	19.3	13.7	2.44	3.26
Final 3 Days	10.5	10.4	8.2	8.1	2.80	3.74

Hunting was more difficult in 1959 when hunters reported spending 33 percent more time to bag each bird. The pheasant

population was lower because production was low and fall cover was extremely heavy, which favored the ringneck. However, it was possible for hunters to average at least one rooster per trip at any time during both seasons.

Distribution of Hunting Pressure and Pheasant Kill by Agricultural Districts. Results of the hunter survey indicated that hunting pressure was quite well distributed throughout the northern two-thirds of the state (Table 3). In most districts, the pheasant kill compared favorably to the pressure. North central Iowa supported 20 percent of the hunting pressure in 1958 and yielded 21 percent of the total kill which was high for the state. Fewer persons traveled to northern Iowa in 1959 due to extremely cold temperatures and snow-covered roads. Hunter success figures and post-seasons sex ratio indicated that the major portion of Iowa's primary pheasant range could support greater hunting pressure.

Table 3. Distribution of Hunting Pressure and Pheasant Kill by Agricultural Districts, Iowa, 1958-1959

District	Percentage of hunting trips		Percentage of birds killed		Number of birds killed	
	1958	1959	1958	1959	1958	1959
1 Northwest	16.4	15.7	16.4	17.2	253,965	184,089
2 North central	20.2	18.2	21.0	19.7	325,198	210,846
3 Northeast	17.6	15.7	18.8	16.8	291,130	179,808
4 West central	9.4	10.8	10.4	11.9	161,051	127,364
5 Central	15.1	13.3	14.8	13.6	229,187	145,559
6 East central	12.5	14.9	10.7	10.4	165,696	111,310
7 Southwest	5.9	7.3	5.6	7.2	86,720	77,060
8 South central	1.6	2.7	1.3	1.9	20,131	20,335
9 Southeast	1.3	1.4	1.0	1.3	15,486	13,914

DISCUSSION

The ringneck pheasant, which was introduced into Iowa about 1906, has become Iowa's most popular game bird. It has provided upland game shooting on millions of acres of fertile farmland where native prairie grouse have disappeared. Pheasants can thrive with intensive agriculture.

Proper management of the ringneck in Iowa requires adequate information concerning hunter activity as well as knowledge of the bird and its habitat. Hunter surveys of this type proved to be a satisfactory method of obtaining this information. The response from hunters was excellent but probably could be improved if cooperators were notified at the time licenses were purchased. The survey could also be expanded to include other small game species.